

The State of Our Community
By Assembly Majority Leader Karen Bass

As we tackle the problems that are plaguing our community, it is evident that we cannot ignore the issue of Black/Brown gang violence that has captured the fascination of those looking in but has devastated those who have to live with it every day. In 2007, the California Legislative Black Caucus released the State of Black California Report, which provides a snap shot of the status of the state's ethnic and racial population relative to whites. The data revealed what many of us who have worked in the community already knew. The quality of life for Blacks and Latinos are identical as it relates to that of white and Asians in California.

As we measured the status of the state's ethnic and racial groups, we saw disturbing trends in key areas including economics, education, housing and criminal justice equally in Blacks and Latinos. For instance, household median incomes for Blacks and Latinos are two-thirds that of whites ranging in the mid \$30,000. Both groups have a fifth of its population living below poverty; have nearly 50 percent of students failing the California High School Exit Exam; a high secondary school dropout rate; receive longer jail sentences for their crimes than whites and Asians; and both have a disproportionate homicide rate for males. This is the most troubling statistic of them all mainly because we are seeing each other, Black and Brown, instituting the violence that is causing this phenomenon. With almost 75 percent of youth gang homicides in the state occurred in Los Angeles County, which houses the largest Black and Latino populations in California, it is evident that the state of our community is in trouble.

The question is...what do we do about it? First we must identify the reasons why such devastation is happening in our community. Blacks and Latinos have played a major part in California's social and economic development making it one of the most diverse states in the country and the sixth largest economy in the world. However, demographic shifts have contributed to some of the animosity that exists between Blacks and Latinos. As the Latino population has grown larger, the Black population has grown smaller mainly due to the migration of Blacks moving to less expensive areas like the Inland Empire. It's the same ole story of the displaced feeling even more displaced as they moved from the majority minority to the minority of the minority group. Everyone is fighting for the same crumbs. When the resources are at a minimum for those that are in need, which is what we have seen over the last decade with programs and funding that help disadvantage and minority communities, it is our innate reaction to fight for what is available. We saw this in the Hurricane Katrina aftermath as people from every ethnicity, background and economic standing fought for the limited resources available even if it meant breaking the law.

Historically violence as a reaction to the lack of access and resources is not a new phenomenon. From the rise of the Los Angeles Black Panthers and US Organization to the formation of the Crips and Blood Gangs, Blacks in Los Angeles had to fight for access for the basic necessities of life even if it was among each other. Today, black on black crimes is still the majority of cases of violence in our community. In some communities like the Harbor Gateway, there has been a long-standing issue of racial violence particularly among the Blacks and Latinos. Whether it's black on black, brown on brown, black on brown or brown on black the reality is that violence in our community can not be tolerated and should not be tolerated.

This must be a priority for our communities, our cities and our state. It has to be addressed both internally and externally. We need a Marshall plan to build a city ride and state level understanding and commitment to combating this issue. This is not just a problem for poor communities. This is a problem for every Los Angelino. A plan requires resources at every level

for prevention, intervention and suppression. Political will is also necessary but may not be embraced unless there is a public out cry to stop the violence. Every elected official has a role to play and most in our community has experience in doing that. Nevertheless, community involvement is a crucial part of our efforts by utilizing a comprehensive approach with all of us playing a key role in developing and implementing the solutions. Legislators can identify and fight for resources as well as pass appropriate legislation to address the needs. The communities must mobilize to ensure the money and legislation is appropriately implemented including holding the city, county and state accountable.

We know that gangs exist and we basically know why they exist. We also know that their existence is crippling our community. We cannot afford to lose another generation because they don't have any other options. We have to work together to guarantee that the options are available. We must be act as a coalition for change and fight for more resources and access to opportunities for us to succeed.

The bottom line --- we must do something. For more information on how you can get involved, contact my office at (323) 937-4747.